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THE TRANSATLANTIC MAILS.

BY J. HENNIKER HEATON, M. P.

THE most ardent Protectionist never yet dreamt of proposing a duty, *eo nomine*, on letters coming from, or sent to, a foreign country. A letter, however ill-spelt and blotted, from a mother in Galway, is certainly a luxury when delivered in New York; but as a man can only have one mother, no American interest is injured by its arrival. And how many millions of American citizens have relatives in Europe, not only in the Emerald Isle, but in crowded English towns, on bleak Scottish braes, by the "castled crags" of the Rhine, along the stormy fiords of Norway, on snow-mantled Russian steppes, high up the sides of Swiss and Hungarian mountains—all of whom welcome a letter from America as Noah welcomed the dove that brought an olive leaf to the Ark. "Thought is free." Nevertheless, correspondence with foreign countries is subject to direct and needless taxation by the United States Government, in common with all the governments which have adhered to the Postal Union.

As is well known, the postage on a letter weighing one ounce, sent 3,500 miles from New York to Vancouver, a foreign town, is two cents; while the charge for sending a letter of half that weight 3,540 miles to another foreign town, Liverpool, is five cents. What is the reason for this difference? It cannot be the cost of conveyance, for railway freightage is higher than sea freightage. It cannot be that the letters sent to Europe prejudice American interests in any way. It cannot be the favorite (though, as will presently be seen, unsound) argument of a British postmaster-general, that the five cents have to cover, not only the cost of putting one outgoing letter on board ship, but of delivering free a return letter, the postage on which has been received by a foreign government. For the postage to Canada

(and I believe to Mexico) is but two cents, though letters coming from the Dominion (or Mexico) are equally delivered without charge. The real reason is that the majority of the Postal Union consists of poor, greedy states, which are not advanced enough to recognize the wisdom of facilitating international correspondence, and have therefore fixed the common Union tariff as high as possible. It is intolerable that the voice of a mighty continent should count for no more than that of Servia or Siam. Yet at the last Postal Union conference the American proposal to establish a common international stamp was rejected chiefly by the votes of insignificant reactionary states, with small interests at stake.

Is there then no remedy? Certainly there is. The Union convention expressly allows any two members of the Union to form a "restricted union" of their own, within which the postage may be lower than the general five-cent rate. The United States have long established such "restricted unions" with Canada and Mexico, to the great benefit of American trade and of international relations. The time has arrived for the institution of a similar "restricted union" with the United Kingdom and perhaps with Germany. To my knowledge such a policy is strongly supported by some of the most eminent American statesmen of both parties; and I shall be happy if I can in any degree strengthen their hands.

The history of the transatlantic mail service is deeply interesting. The *Sirius* was the first steamship to cross the ocean that divides the Old from the New World. She left Cork on April 5, 1838, and eighteen days later the smoke from her funnel was descried at Sandy Hook. Two ships now in existence accomplish the voyage in less than $5\frac{1}{2}$ days.

For many years the American mails (as well as American goods) were carried to Europe almost exclusively in British vessels. Early in the century the British Government adopted the sagacious policy of subsidizing the shipping companies which ran vessels to the colonies and to foreign countries. Infant settlements like those at Port Jackson (Sydney) or the Cape could not, of course, supply trade enough to make the voyages remunerative. And now that such settlements have shot up into rich and powerful colonies, the subsidies are continued on a more lavish scale, on two conditions: First, that the subsidized vessels shall be con-

structed so as to be easily converted into cruisers in case of war ; Second, that they shall carry the mails. This policy of state aid was so brilliantly successful in developing trade and maintaining the supremacy of the British mercantile marine, that it was adopted in turn by all the great powers, with the single exception, until quite recently, of the United States. As American ships were not subsidized, their owners could not compete with the Cunard and other companies, the art of shipbuilding languished, and the American carrying trade was transferred to foreign bottoms. In 1891 only thirteen per cent. of the exports from the United States was carried in American ships, which at one time had engrossed ninety per cent. As a consequence of refusing \$5,000,000 a year in subsidies during thirty years to native shipowners, or \$150,000,000, the United States had to pay in the same period no less than \$3,000,000,000 for freights, while their mercantile marine dwindled into insignificance. The fact that the country bore this heavy drain upon its earnings so long without feeling it—as if it had been a flea-bite—affords the highest possible proof of its amazing vitality and vigor. At the same time, one is puzzled to understand why the proverbial shrewdness of the American, unfailingly exhibited in his private affairs, was missing for more than a generation in this important section of national business.

In 1891, however, the famous Subsidy Act was passed. By this measure subsidies for the carriage of mails were assigned to steamships to be owned and officered and largely manned by Americans, and either built or registered in the States at the following rates : for the first-class vessels (of 8,000 tons, steaming 20 knots an hour), \$4 a mile ; for the second class (5,000 tons, steaming 16 knots), \$2 ; for the third (2,500 tons, steaming 14 knots), \$1 ; and for the fourth (1,500 tons, steaming 12 knots), \$0.67. Vessels of the first, second, and third classes were to be constructed with a view to prompt conversion into cruisers.

The inevitable result of this spirited “new departure” must be to transfer the carriage of the United States mails once more to American ships. Every protectionist, even if he be an Englishman, will agree that this is as it should be. But what specially pleases me, as a postal reformer, in the Subsidies Act, is the abandonment of the absurd principle of calculating subsidies by making “fancy” payments for the mails, according to

weight. The subsidies are to be paid in proportion to the vessel's speed and size ; the first qualification having relation to the mail service, the second to the encouragement of trade and ship-building. How fallacious the system of payment by weight is appears in several ways. Thus for many years a British government has been paying 3s. per pound for the carriage of letters to the States, while the American Government was charged only 1s. 10d. per pound for the carriage (in the same ships and between the same ports) of its letters to Great Britain. That weight was not the determining factor was proved by the fact that the charge made by the steamship companies for carrying a pound of journals, or papers bearing printed characters, was never more than six cents, while the rate for a pound of letters, or papers bearing written characters, was 75 cents. As I have over and over again pointed out, the steamship-owners neither know nor care whether any mailbag contains letters or newspapers. Yet by the system of charging more freightage for letters than for newspapers they are apparently striving to keep in line with postal tariffs. The explanation of course is that this system is forced on them by the Post-Office, which has even to inform them how many pounds of letters and journals respectively they have carried, and are to charge for. The British postal officials gravely argue upon this that the letter postage must be correspondingly higher than the newspaper postage. Accordingly, they charge as postage on a newspaper weighing four ounces to any part of the world two cents, while their charge for a letter weighing four ounces sent in the same mailbag would be 40 cents. It reminds one of the riddle which puzzles, I will not say the American, but the British youth: "Which is the heavier, a pound of feathers or a pound of lead ?"

The key to this question is to calculate the freightage payable for a bulk of cargo equal to that of the mails ; on deducting the amount of such freightage from the total sum paid to the shipowner, the balance represents the subsidy paid to secure reserve cruisers, and encourage trade and shipbuilding.

Take the year 1889. In that year our Post-Office sent to the States 1,448 tons of mails, and paid in subsidies £95,170 (or \$475,850). It was announced that after allowing for postage received to the amount of nearly £63,000 (\$315,000), there was a "loss" of £32,300 (\$161,500), and the Postmaster-

General indignantly pointed to this "loss" as a conclusive answer to the demand for penny postage to America. Now the ordinary rate of freightage could not exceed £2 (or \$10) per ton, or for the 1,448 tons of mails £2,896 (\$14,480). Deducting this freightage from the postage received of \$315,000 it is obvious that, instead of paying too little, the unfortunate letter-writers had paid \$300,520 too much; and deducting it from the subsidy of \$375,850, it is equally clear that the balance of \$361,370 represents a pure bonus to the shipowners. I have gone into detail on this subject, because the same bogey of "loss" may be heard of on the farther side of the Atlantic.

I assert that there would be an absolute profit on an Anglo-American penny or two-cent post, looking simply to the cost of the freightage. The calculations on which this belief is founded are too long for the pages of a popular review. But the cost of (a) getting one outgoing letter on board ship at New York, (b) freightage to England, and (c) delivering in the States a return letter from England, would hardly exceed 1½ cents; leaving ½ cent profit on the transaction. It must not be forgotten that under the Postal Union convention each country pays for the conveyance of its own mails to the frontier of the country of destination, and delivers free all mails reaching it from other countries.

I, of course, have always denied that there has been a loss to the Post-Office on the carriage of mails to America, notwithstanding the fact that we pay the "fancy" price of 3s. per pound for their conveyance. During the reign of my lamented friend Mr. Raikes, Postmaster-General of England, I fought the matter out with him. I pointed out that the number of letters to the pound (to America) averaged 40. On these he got 2½d. each; that is, 8s. 4d. a pound. He paid the steamship companies only 3s. a pound, and I asserted that the 5s. 4d. a pound surplus amply repaid the cost of dealing with the letters both to and from America.

At this point I may call attention to the astounding increase of letter correspondence with America. In 1880 only 128,000 pounds weight of letters (in round numbers) were received from the United States, and in 1891 270,000 pounds weight of letters reached us. In other words 5,000,000 letters were received from the United States in 1880, and over 10,000,000 in 1891. My object in giving these figures is to show first the great improvement in our social relations with America, and secondly to prove that

with the popular two-cent or penny rate the correspondence might fairly be expected to be instantly quadrupled.

Will not some strong and far-sighted American Postmaster-General enter into correspondence with the British Government, with a view to the conclusion of a convention for the mutual exchange by the two countries of their mails, the postage rates being identical with their domestic or inland rates ? This convention would exactly correspond to the existing American convention with Canada and Mexico. I can positively assure such a minister that Great Britain will heartily and gladly respond to his invitation.

It may be interesting to mention that after a seven-years war with Post-Office bigotry and obstruction, I have persuaded the British Government to undertake to establish penny postage to her colonies, provided these colonies assent. Canada, Victoria, New Zealand, and Tasmania have already assented ; and the adhesion of the remaining great colonies is shortly expected. Why should not this "restricted union" be extended so as to include the United States, and thus form an Anglo-Saxon union ? This suggestion was enthusiastically welcomed in England when I first made it, three years ago, and I have never heard to this day any objection to it that would bear examination. Of course we are anxious to develop our correspondence with our American cousins. Are they not our own flesh and blood ? Have not two and a half millions of our sons and daughters emigrated to the States during the last seventeen years, not to speak of another half-million who have settled in Canada ? Did not American workmen and work-women send over last year (in a year of depression) £1,170,000 in small money orders to their poor relatives, left behind them in the United Kingdom ? Do not the richer citizens of the Great Republic regard it as a sacred duty to make at least one pilgrimage to the land of their fathers ? and do not the American working-classes, too poor to become Hadjis, take the keenest interest in the fortunes of the old country ? Surely the provision of the Postal Union convention authorizing "restricted unions" was made for such a case as this. Surely America will share with Great Britain and Ireland privileges which she has freely conceded to Canada and even to Mexico ! England extends her hand ; can America refuse to grasp it ?

The American Government is not likely to object to penny

postage, for it is the honorable distinction of the Washington postal administration that it refuses to make a profit out of the correspondence of the people, and if the Postmaster-General detects signs of a coming surplus he instantly casts about for the means of expending it to the best advantage in developing and improving the service. Thus one Minister has suggested one cent inland postage, another the free delivery of newspapers. The effect of a two-cent transatlantic post upon the revenue would, of course, be trifling, as compared with the vast interests concerned. Thus the total postal revenue was in 1891 (the latest year for which I can obtain a return) \$65,908,909 ; whereas the total expenditure on the Atlantic service did not exceed \$400,000.

I may here give a few figures, showing the growth of correspondence between the two nations, and the corresponding extension of their commerce. Some writers of the *dilettante* type decry the use of statistics, but every experienced lecturer knows the value of his blackboard and chalk. In 1877 our total imports from the States amounted to £77,825,973, and our exports to the States to £19,885,893. In 1893 these amounts were respectively £104,409,050 and £41,066,147.

Nearly all the articles exported to us from the States are of native growth or manufacture, and England is by far the best customer for American goods. It may safely be asserted therefore that the reduction of transatlantic postage would largely benefit American manufacturers and workingmen.

Mails to United Kingdom from United States.			Mails to United States from United Kingdom.		
Year.	Letters and postcards.	Other articles.	Year.	Letters and postcards.	Other articles.
1880	127,344	562,467	1884	227,245	.....
1884	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
1885	197,841	932,535	1887	1,028,249	.....
1887	227,723	1,288,249	1888	285,128	2,421,374
1888	.....	.....	1889	321,193	2,923,939
1889	261,415	1,286,607	1890	.....	.....
1890	279,145	1,315,922	1891	1,388,510	.....
1891	269,844	.....	1893	318,000	.....
1893	.....	.....	

As the British Post-Office (whose motto is, *Odi profanum vulgus*) jealously withholds all statistics of the foreign mail ser-

vice, I have gleaned these fragmentary returns from American reports, for which I am indebted to my distinguished friend, the Hon. John Wanamaker.

The subsidies paid to steamship companies during the year 1889 by the several States were as follows :

France.....	\$4,953,112	Spain.....	\$988,977
Great Britain.....	3,210,434	Japan.....	739,576
*Germany.....	1,261,400	United States.....	600,000
Italy.....	1,957,947		

It need not be pointed out that the Subsidies Act will place the United States at the head, instead of the end of the list.

For the present there is distressing irregularity in the transmission of mails, which are assigned one day to a fast vessel and another day to a slow one; so that a writer posting on Wednesday may sometimes communicate with his correspondent no sooner than another writer who waits till Friday. On one occasion I left England in the "City of Paris." On the same day the mails were dispatched in the "Germanic." I reached New York four days before the mails arrived there. Of course when the new vessels now building are complete this irregularity will disappear.

I have not dealt with the question of rival ports, because their advantages are almost equal, and it is a mere fight between the localities concerned for local trade. Neither have I dwelt on the question of speed. While I write I have before me a strong personal appeal from a well-known gentleman, Mr. G. A. Haig, who declares his ability to construct vessels capable of travelling sixty miles an hour.

. It is now time to speak of Sir Charles Tupper's favorite scheme for diverting the transatlantic mail traffic from England to Halifax, or some other point in Nova Scotia. His idea is that we should have a national service, purely British, avoiding American territory. Halifax is only 2,463 miles from Liverpool, whereas the distance from New York to Southampton is 3,080 miles, to Queenstown 3,250, and to Liverpool 3,540. It is asserted that the distance from Ireland to the nearest point of Canadian territory is not more than 1,800 miles. Although some parts of the Nova Scotian coast are obstructed by ice in the winter, others are accessible; and the voyage could be accomplished in four and a half days. Of course the British Government has the right to send its

* Germany has since increased her subsidies to \$1,986,400.

American mails by Canada, thus delivering mails in Chicago at least a day in advance of letters by New York.

The total amount received by Great Britain for postage of letters and newspapers to North America is about £185,000 a year. An offer to pay one of the steamship companies £100,000 a year for the service was rejected. Quite recently an enterprising shipowner, Mr. Huddart, has offered to perform the service for a subsidy of £150,000 (\$750,000) per annum, a sum sufficient to pay for the construction of several steamships with a speed of 20 knots. Whether his offer will be accepted is not known. But it is quite clear that the postage received will cover the cost; for besides the £185,000 there is the postage received on Canadian letters sent to the United Kingdom. The postage receipts in the States and England together for transatlantic mails must exceed £300,000 (or \$1,500,000), a sum amply sufficient to make the service so swift and constant as to defeat all competition. But at present the honorable rivalry of the two governments—one striving to restore its shipbuilding industry, the other to maintain its commercial supremacy on the seas, prevents their combined action.

Though less virtually interesting than the transportation of mails, the transatlantic passenger traffic is sufficiently important to call for the best attainable service. It has been calculated that during the season about 39,000 rich Americans visit Europe, spending on the average about £300 each, or \$58,500,000. About 45,000 rich Britons have been said on the same authority to visit America, in the same period, spending about as much in the States. The Cunard Company alone conveyed in 1893 no less than 102,720 passengers across the ocean; and it is probable that at least 400,000 persons are thus transported every twelve-month. These floating multitudes represent the culture, the learning, the intellect, the wealth, and the aristocracy of the two peoples. They come and go, not to spy out the nakedness of the land they visit, but to assimilate all that is best in its ideas and methods, to remind their hosts of the existence of closely related millions over the sea, speaking Shakespeare's tongue, governed by the laws of Alfred, thinking kindly of their kinsmen. Such a circulation of messengers of goodwill is of inestimable benefit in destroying noxious prejudices, and keeping the two mightiest peoples on earth in touch and harmony.

For the masses, however, whose lot it is to toil on, "week in, week out, from morn till night," as Longfellow sings, there is no meeting on this side of the grave with friends so far away. They have no consolation, no means of exchanging confidences and assurances of affection, except by means of the post. In each generation three millions of British folk settle in the States, and labor to increase the wealth and power of the great republic. Cannot we find it in our hearts to take off the paltry taxation that weighs on the correspondence of these poor people, without appreciably augmenting the postal revenue? A half-dollar tax on pug-dogs or fast trotting-horses would bring in double the amount. Whenever this simple reform—call it generosity or justice, which you will—is carried out, there will be joy in myriads of huts and shanties on both sides of the Atlantic, in poor back rooms of great cities, in the workshop, the mine and the field, wherever the poor toil and suffer. Let legislators and statesmen turn aside for a moment from the cares of *la haute politique* to scatter with generous hand among their humble fellow-citizens that purest and sweetest of all human pleasures, "a letter from home."

J. HENNIKER HEATON.